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DE RUEHTI #0557 2071123  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 251123Z JUL 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7286  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC

UNCLAS TIRANA 000557

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE, DS/IP/EUR, DS/CR/CIL, DS/CR/CIF  
DOJ FOR OPDAT AND ICITAP

E.O. 12958:N/A  
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SUBJECT: Albania's Success in a Criminal Financial Investigation

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Scoring a major victory in a complex financial investigation, police and prosecutors with the Joint Investigative Unit to Fight Economic Crime and Corruption (JIU) arrested the head of a criminal group and his 16 collaborators for robbing ATM machines. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Dubbed "Operation Matrix," the JIU arrested the 17 suspects for robbing ATM machines using counterfeit credit cards containing personalized information of third parties, resulting in over two million euros in losses to victims including Albanian and foreign banks, stores in Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia and citizens from the US, UK and Canada. The investigation began in November 2007 immediately after the American Bank of Albania discovered suspicious money transactions which were then reported to police. DOJ-OPDAT, acting as a liaison between the JIU and the U.S. Embassy, asked the RSO to forward 53 pictures captured by video cameras at ATMs and retail shops to the Computer Investigations and Forensics Branch of the Diplomatic Security Service for the purpose of enhancing their quality to make the defendants' faces more visible. These enhanced photos were instrumental in identifying the defendants.

¶3. (U) Endrit Gjergjani, considered by police to be the brain of the criminal group, is accused of purchasing personal information through the internet from computer hackers to create counterfeit credit cards. At Gjergjani's home, police seized a sophisticated electronic device, purchased in Russia, along with blank credit cards and other IT equipment. Police claim Gjergjani supplied counterfeit Visa and MasterCard Credit Cards to his associates who would then withdraw money from ATM machines to purchase luxury items either in Albania or ordered from abroad. Police have documented at least 400 such ATM withdrawals in different cities throughout Albania. Police also seized several expensive cars and other luxury items purchased with these counterfeit cards.

¶4. (SBU) The Director General of the Albanian police described this as the "the crime of the future," while praising the investigation as a successful cooperation between the Economic and Financial Crime Unit of the Police, the Tirana police special operations unit, bank experts and JIU prosecutors who led the entire process.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: This case demonstrates both the growing sophistication of Albanian criminals and the growing capabilities of Albanian law enforcement to investigate these modern crimes. The prosecutors on this case participated in OPDAT-sponsored training, and the assistance provided by the Diplomatic Security Service directly impacted the success of this operation. OPDAT will continue to offer training and assistance to Albanian prosecutors for conducting complex financial crime investigations.

WITHERS